Summary and Analysis of Public Comments: "Report on the National Agricultural Library – 2001"

Executive Summary

One hundred and nine customers and stakeholders reviewed and commented on the "Report on the National Agricultural Library – 2001" and services of the National Agricultural Library (NAL). The responders were a well-balanced representation of NAL's diverse customers. They were diverse in geographic location, by job function, scientific discipline, and organizational affiliation, and represented diverse points of view. Their responses indicated that NAL is functioning reasonably well as a library for the Department of Agriculture, but is struggling to meet its legislated mission to serve as a national library. The difficulties NAL has in meeting its national role were felt by most groups to be the result of inadequate administrative and financial support. All groups who responded valued NAL as a resource, one that improved their efficiency and effectiveness, and were in favor of enhancing electronic access to information. Electronic services were shown to be essential for those located in remote areas with limited access to research libraries. The responders voiced deep concern for the future direction of the AGRICOLA database and offered several options for its enhancement. The comments indicate the database remains a valuable albeit eroding resource. Finally, the proposed national digital library, the organizing principle in the Report for the future direction of NAL, received overwhelming support from those who commented.

Introduction

The National Agricultural Library, Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture issued the task force "Report on the National Agricultural Library – 2001" for 30 days of public comment, which concluded September 16, 2002.

The report represents the work of a task force appointed to assess the National Agricultural Library (NAL) in pursuit of its legislated mandate to serve as the chief agricultural information resource of the United States[1]. The task force conducted an extensive study of the mission, management, programs and operations of the NAL. Study methods included stakeholder surveys, comparisons with other national library operations, and internal reviews. Through this report the task force laid the foundation for substantive recommendations to the Department for the long-term management of the NAL, an important information resource for the food, fiber, and agriculture enterprise.

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[1]"Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990" codified at 7 USCS 3125a

Herein are summarized the public comments received on the report and services of the NAL. Analysis is provided for the convenience of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board and includes information about the diversity of viewpoints, geographic distribution of responders, and stakeholder profiles. Such information may be useful to the Board to ensure the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act[2] have been fulfilled in their work to produce consensus recommendations with public input.

> *Professional Association comment*
> "The American Library Association recognizes the importance of the Report as a benchmark for USDA and NAL to use to improve the library and its resources. Clearly there is need for USDA and NAL to discuss the Report at length and speedily act upon it. A critical first step would be the USDA budget submission for FY2004 which should be amended to detail a five year plan for increased expenditures for improvement of the NAL similar to that outlined in the Report. "

Reaching NAL's Diverse Stakeholder Populations

On August 16, 2002 a notice was published in the *Federal Register* [Volume 67, Number 159, page 53557] announcing availability of the report and the public comment period. Significant effort was taken to ensure widespread awareness and distribution of the notice to the diverse stakeholders and customers of the National Agricultural Library. At the close of the comment period 109 responses were received.

Distribution of the Announcement

The Federal Advisory Committee Act lays out the requirements for developing consensus recommendations based on public input. These requirements specify the need to have balanced input representing diversity of viewpoints and functions. Balanced input can be obtained by ensuring that a cross-section of interested persons and groups with demonstrated professional or personal qualifications or experience are given the opportunity and are encouraged to participate in the process.

A communication plan designed to reach the widest possible cross-section of NAL stakeholders and customers was established prior to the release of the *Federal Register* notice. The plan was implemented upon publication of the notice.

Implementation of the Communication Plan

The following lists report the principal means by which key stakeholder and customer groups were notified about the Report and the public comment period. In addition to the

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[2]41 CFR Parts 101-6 and 102-3 Federal Advisory Committee Management; Final Rule

methods and groups listed below many individual personal and professional contacts were made encouraging participation.

Reaching USDA Stakeholders and Customers
Announcements were included with or sent to the following:
- All NAL document delivery fulfillments between 8/20 – 9/13/02
- NAL Current Awareness Literature Service clients
- Agricultural Research Service Administrator's Council
- Bulletin boards in the South Agriculture Building
- USDA Working Group on Water Quality
- On-site distribution in the NAL Reading Rooms in Beltsville & Washington, D.C.
- Posted to a Food and Nutrition Service Listserv
- USDA Field Libraries
- NAL Digital Desktop Library (DigiTop) Initiative Committee (Department-wide initiative to provide consortium procurement for full-text journals and database resources accessible at employee workstations)
- National Arboretum staff

Reaching Librarians and Information Specialists
Announcements were included with or sent to the following:
- Agriculture Network Information Center (AgNIC) Listserv
- United States Agricultural Information Network (USAIN) Listserv
- Chesapeake Information and Research Library Alliance (CIRLA) Directors
- Federal and Armed Forces Library Consortium (American Library Association)
- Public Service Directors of the American Library Association (ALA)
- Technical Service Directors of the ALA
- CENDI (an interagency working group of senior information managers from 9 Federal agencies and Departments)
- Federal Library and Information Center Committee Listserv
- Association of Research Library Directors
- Association of College and Research Library's Science and Technology Listserv
- DIG-Ref Listserv (interest group for digital reference services)
- Vet-Lib Listserv (interest group for veterinary librarians)
- Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries Listserv
- Special Library Association's Science and Technology Listserv
- Land-Grant University Libraries
- 1890's Historically Black Colleges and Universities Libraries
- 1994 Tribal College Libraries

Reaching Special Audiences:
Announcements were included or sent to the following:
- Riley Memorial Foundation (who distributed approximately 1,200 copies)
- Enviro-News-L listserv (environmental and water quality interest group)
- Food and Nutrition and Food Safety Listserv's
    - WIC Talk Listserv (Women, Infant, and Children)

- o Food Safety Listserv
- o Mealtalk Listserv (Healthy School Meals focus)
- o Successtalk Listserv
- o Cacfp-Summertalk Listserv
- Food Industry Environment Network
- National Invasive Species Council (shared with the Invasive Species Advisory Board and other interested parties)
- Wheat and Barley Head Scab Listserv
- Center for Science in the Public Interest

Reaching Special Stakeholders:
Announcements were sent to the following:
- Members of the Task Force (authors of the Report)
- NAL Contractors and their representatives (MISTI, Telesec, Global Solutions Network, etc.)
- Publishers (Netherlands Publishers Listserv)
- University of Maryland, College of Library and Information Sciences
- International stakeholders –
  - o IICA – Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
  - o SIDALC – Agricultural Information and Documentation System for America
  - o IFLA – International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
  - o CGIAR – Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

Newsletters and Other Special Postings:
Announcements were published or posted to the following:
- ARS Press Release and posted to the ARS News Web-site (8/16/02)
- CSREES Update (8/23/02)
- American Libraries Association Washington Office Newsline (8/27/02)
- IFLA Conference Newsletter (8/24/02)
- Posted to the NAL Home Page (8/16/02)
- Extensively cross posted throughout the NAL Web-site (scrolling alerts posted in the last week of the comment period to many Web pages)

Web-Based Access to the Report

"The Report on the National Agricultural Library – 2001" was posted to the NAL Web-site < http://www.nal.usda.gov/assessment/ > in HTML and pdf formats. The Web-site for the Report received 14,501 "hits" during the open period for public comments. The daily viewing trend is plotted against the frequency of responses received by day (see Figure 1). Many individuals who read the executive summary or the full report responded with comments.

Fig. 1 Comments Received & Web-Page Hits (x 100) / Day
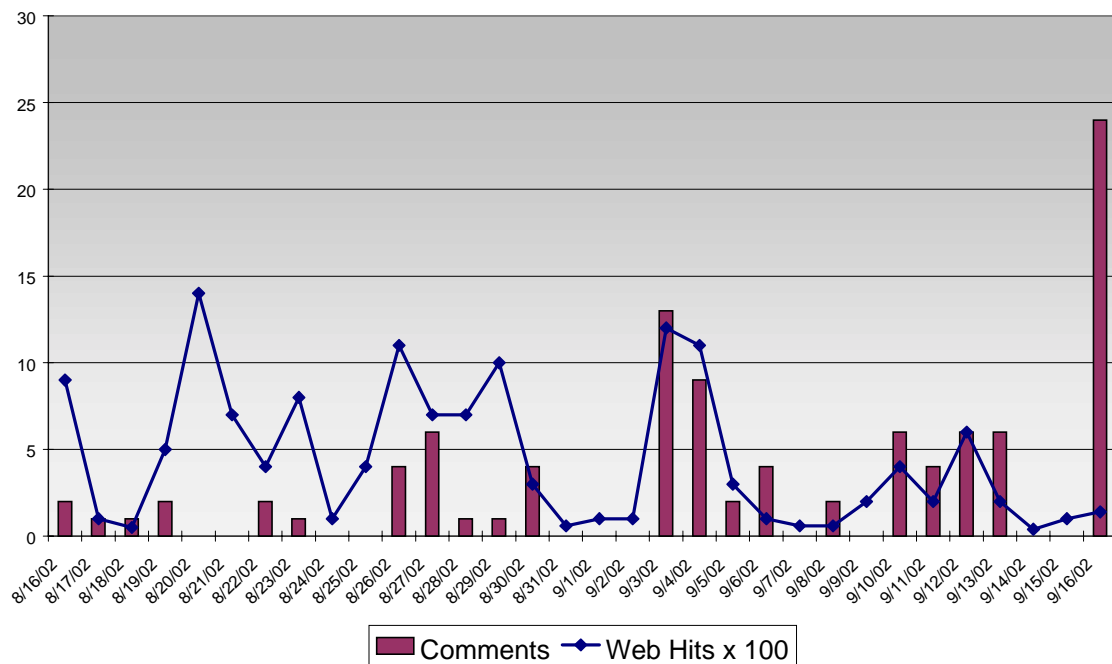
Many thousands of individuals across a diverse range of stakeholders were provided with the opportunity to respond to the Report and its recommendations. A number of

concerned citizens identified their needs and wrote about why they needed the National Agricultural Library and the changes they would like to see. These comments provide answers to the question of why the National Agricultural Library is needed.

> **Researcher comment**
> "The National Agricultural Library is invaluable to me in my job. I am working on the Agriculture Handbook 450 now trying to meet the deadline and the Library's timely retrieval of articles is allowing me to update my manuscripts. I am in a remote location and do not have access to agricultural libraries so I need the NAL services."

Responder profile

Broad stakeholder and customer input is a requirement of the Federal Advisory Committee Act for the development of consensus recommendations. Responder profiles were created to verify broad participation. Profile characteristics included information about the geographic location of the responder at the state level, high-level affiliation classification (e.g. Land-Grant University), and job function.

In most cases profile characteristics were provided in the text of the response. In a few cases additional research was conducted by searching telephone directories, organizational charts, and institutional information available on the Internet.

All illegal, junk, spam, or other spurious E-mail messages were deleted from the account without being counted or recorded.

Number of responders = 109

Geographic Distribution

>   32 States
>   Washington, D.C.
>   Intergovernmental Organization
>   Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

Affiliation Distribution

Government Responders:
USDA employees account for 48% of all responses and represent the Agricultural Research Service, Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Food Safety Inspection Service, Animal, Plant, Health Inspection Service, and Economic Research Service.

Other Federal Agency responders represent the Smithsonian, Food and Drug Administration, Department of the Interior, Administration on Aging, Department of Energy, and Government Printing Office.

State and local responses were received from Extension, and city-based Head Start Programs.

University / Education Responders:

U.S. Responder Locations	Number
Alaska	1
Arizona	6
Arkansas	1
California	5
Colorado	1
Florida	1
Georgia	1
Hawaii	1
Idaho	2
Illinois	4
Louisiana	2
Maryland	24
Massachusetts	1
Michigan	3
Mississippi	1
Missouri	2
Montana	1
Nebraska	1
New York	2
North Dakota	1
North Carolina	1
Ohio	1
Oklahoma	3
Oregon	6
Pennsylvania	5
Tennessee	2
Texas	5
Unresolved / Other	7
Utah	3
Virginia	1
Washington	2
Washington, DC	6
West Virginia	1
Wisconsin	3

The second largest group responding to the Report was composed of members of the Land-Grant Universities (22%). Within the land-grant group the majority of responders were librarians, additionally responses were received from researchers and administrators including a Dean of Agriculture. Other responders in this category included members from the 1994 Tribal Colleges, non-land grant universities (5%), K-12 public school teacher, youth development (Future Farmers of America, and 4-H).
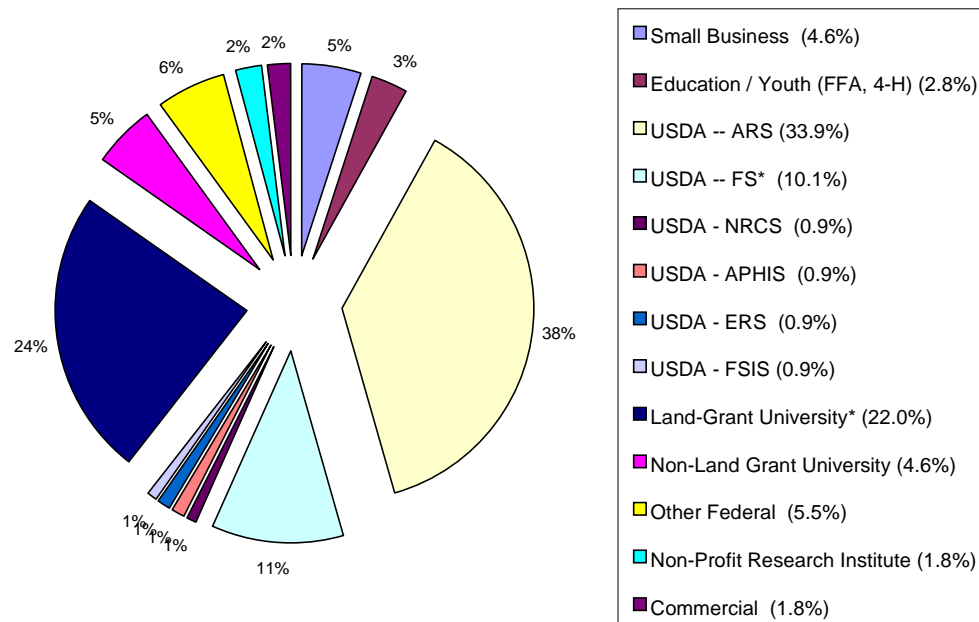
Business / Commercial Responders:
Representatives from a small business commodity processing firm, two woman-owned and minority owned companies, corporate librarians, and a non-profit genomics research institute commented on the Report.

Institutional Responders:
Formal responses were received from several institutions and associations including, CAB International, the Executive Board of the AgNIC Alliance, the American Library Association, and the Executive Council of the United States Agricultural Information Network (USAIN).

Fig. 2 Responder Affiliation

- Small Business (4.6%)
- Education / Youth (FFA, 4-H) (2.8%)
- USDA -- ARS (33.9%)
- USDA -- FS* (10.1%)
- USDA - NRCS (0.9%)
- USDA - APHIS (0.9%)
- USDA - ERS (0.9%)
- USDA - FSIS (0.9%)
- Land-Grant University* (22.0%)
- Non-Land Grant University (4.6%)
- Other Federal (5.5%)
- Non-Profit Research Institute (1.8%)
- Commercial (1.8%)

Job Function

Responders came from a wide diversity of job functions including a branch secretary, researchers, librarians, national program leaders, assistant administrators, deans, and the president of a small woman-owned company. Researchers were engaged in a wide range of important agricultural research disciplines, many significant organizations and

institutions were represented along with several essential community / public service functions.

Examples of Position Titles

President	Director of Research and Development
Laboratory Director	University Librarian / Deputy Vice Provost for Info. Services
FIA National Ozone Advisor	Science and Technology Reference Librarian
Research Librarian	Public school agriculture education teacher
Supervisory Computer Specialist	Professor and Assistant to the Dean for E-Extension
Head Life Sciences Library	Assistant Professor of Equine Science
Library Director	Nutritionist for City of Oakland, Head Start Program
Research Physiologist	Vice Provost & Dean College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
National Program Leader	Extension Agent – 4-H/Youth
Forester/GIS Specialist	Civil Engineering Director

Fig. 3 Job Function

Legend:
- Unresolved / Other
- Researcher -- Animal Science
- Researcher -- Plant Science
- Researcher -- Food Science
- Researcher -- Natural Resources/Forestry
- Researcher -- Chemistry / Physics
- Engineer
- Statistician
- Research Administrator
- Academic Administrators
- Librarian
- Library Director/ Branch Head
- Extension
- Youth Development
- Public School Ag Education Teacher
- Director R&D, Commercial
- President / Managing Partner

Job Function Definitions Used for Analysis

Four job function classes were established and used throughout the analysis. These classes are Researchers, Librarians, Educators, and Administrator/Managers. They are described below. Another category "All Other" was established for those responders who did not fit into any of the four primary categories.

Researchers: (39% of Responders)

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This category included researchers and laboratory directors who were generally considered to be engaged in active research. Most major agricultural disciplines were represented by responders to the Report. The disciplines represented included plant sciences, animal sciences, genetics, food science, ecology, forestry specialties, entomology, soil science, chemistry, physics, engineering, statistics, pathology, nutrition, economics, and so forth. Most researchers responding to the Report were USDA employees (81%). A few researchers from Land-Grant Universities and the private sector also responded.

Library and Information Sciences: (29% of Responders)
Most librarians and information specialists who responded to the Report were employed by Land-Grant University libraries, including a Library Director at a 1994 Tribal College. Federal librarians who responded were from NAL, an ARS field library, the Department of the Interior, and GPO. A few librarians from non-land grant universities, corporate libraries, and a librarian from a not-for-profit research institute commented on the report.

Educators / Youth Development: (5% of Responders)
This category represents professionals who teach students in grades K-12 and professionals involved in outreach / training programs for youth development or adult education. The responders included: one public school agriculture education teacher; professionals in youth development from the Future Farmers of America and Extension 4-H programs; one Managing Partner of a small woman/minority-owned company with a focus on educational issues; and a University-based institute focusing on child nutrition/education issues.

This is a cross-over category that could have included clinicians, university professors and so forth. However, it was decided to code into this category only those responders whose primary job functions were identified as educators or education-related policy-makers.

Administrators / Managers: (19% of Responders)
This category represents the top management and policy-setting functions for government, university, and corporate entities. Individuals within this category generally do not provide direct client services or conduct research. Within this group comments from corporate sources were submitted by the President of a woman-owned information services business and the Director of Research and Development for a commodity processing firm. The land-grant university communities were represented by the Vice Provost and Dean for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, a University Librarian and Deputy Vice Provost for Information Services, and Head of a Life Sciences Library on a major campus. Government administrators and managers included national program leaders and an Assistant Administrator. In addition to individual responders a few organizational responses were coded in this section, since these groups are involved in policy matters.

All Other: (7% of Responders)

This category includes responders whose job functions did not fit the primary categories described above such as, clinical dieticians, support staff, an international intergovernmental not-for-profit organization or for those whose affiliation could not be identified.

Mapping Comments to the Report Recommendations

Positive or supportive comments were mapped to the most relevant recommendation of the Report. Alternative options, qualifications, concerns, new recommendations, or negative responses were not coded in the spreadsheet but were noted and addressed with the relevant recommendation where appropriate or noted elsewhere when they stand alone. The comments were classified by specific recommendation and by a generally descriptive job function. This analysis provides insight into the diverse needs and views of NAL's stakeholders and customers.

Twenty-eight specific recommendations were organized under four high-level categories in the Executive Summary of the Report. The first category "Innovations in Information Services" provides the vision for what the future scope and services of the National Agricultural Library might be. The second category relates to "Organizational Structure" and provides guidance as to the elements needed to implement the vision described in the first category of the recommendations. The third category, "Planning & Evaluation Processes" provides guidance for managing and maintaining this national resource. The last category "Leadership" defines a national role for NAL within a dynamic national agricultural information system.

Mapping Methodology

The following examples are used to provide a general understanding of how the public comments were scored by recommendation category and job function of the responder. This two-dimensional mapping allowed the analysis to consider how each major job function responded to the individual recommendations. A spreadsheet was set up with each of the 28 recommendations in the Executive Summary, tracking individual positive responses for 5 job function categories (researcher, librarian, educator, administrator/manager, and all other).

Each individual element of a responder's positive comments was interpreted and mapped to the most relevant recommendation. In most cases the comments related to more than one specific recommendation, therefore the total number of responses recorded greatly exceeds the total number of responders.

Statements that differed significantly with the Report's recommendation were not recorded in the spreadsheet. Instead, these statements were noted and are discussed in the results section within the context of the relevant recommendation category. These differences ranged from qualifications or cautions for specific recommendations, to the outright rejection of a recommendation. In addition to these variances some responders provided alternative solutions or in rare cases new recommendations. These variances

are also discussed in the appropriate results section within the context of the relevant recommendation category.

The following examples demonstrate how common response patterns were mapped to the recommendations.

Common Mapping Examples:
A preamble paragraph from the Executive Summary was extensively copied by responders. This expression was coded as overall support for the Report recommendations, and specific support for recommendations: I a, I c, I e, I f, II a, III e, and IV c.

Many responders spoke of their needs for enhanced electronic access to information resources. These needs were coded as supporting Report recommendations: I a, III e, and IV c. In some cases II a was also coded to these responses.

Support for enhanced delivery of information resources was coded as supporting Report recommendations: I a, I f, and IV c.

Comments relating to the need to update AGRICOLA and/or its Web interface were coded as supporting recommendation I c. Likewise comments requesting services similar to the National Library of Medicine's PubMED were also coded as supportive of recommendation I c.

Comments describing the need or support for an increase in funding or support for NAL were coded as supportive of recommendation II c.

Comments relating to the position of the NAL director were diverse and reflected a similar lack of consensus to that seen in the Report. In order to represent more accurately responder viewpoints the recommendation was broken down into three pairs of opposing elements and scored accordingly.

- SES appointment 4 year term performance-based renewal (Report)
- SES appointment no term limitation

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- Political appointment
- Not a political appointment

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- Library degree preferred (Report)
- Library degree not-preferred

Comments that complimented the Report and supported in general panel recommendations were coded into a separate class indicating overall support for the Report and its global recommendations. If additional statements were offered

they were parsed and coded in the spreadsheet (an indication that some recommendations may have higher priority than others in the responder's view).

Comments that reflected past and/or current use of NAL resources without specifically stating an endorsement for the corresponding Report recommendation were inferred to represent support and coded as supporting the relevant recommendation.

Results

Nearly all comments received were relevant for the purposes of public comment on the "Report on the National Agricultural Library – 2001". Approximately 10% of all responders indicated overall endorsement of the Report and its recommendations. Within this group many cited a preamble paragraph from the Executive Summary of the Report, while the remainder offered no further comment. Many responders reflected on specific recommendations which in most cases were an indication of their personal experiences with the products and services of the National Agricultural Library. In other words, those who responded to the Report knew of the Library, had used the Library, and are stakeholders of NAL.

Specific comments were mapped to the most relevant recommendation in the Executive Summary of the Report. Most comments (34%) responded to the recommendations under *I Innovation in Information Services*. This category describes a vision for what the NAL could or should be and is closer to what NAL stakeholders want and need. The responders are familiar with the current services and have an idea of what they would like to see changed, therefore they are more conversant on these points. The category *II Organizational Structure* accounted for 26% of all comments with most of these directed to budget issues. Administrators and Managers responded proportionately more to the recommendations in the *III Planning and Evaluation Process* category. Librarians responded proportionately most favorably to the recommendations in the *IV Leadership* category. This response reflects their need for NAL to serve a leadership role for the profession and the field.

Fig. 4 Total Comments by Category

Legend:
- General Endorsement
- I Innovation in Information Services
- II Organizational Structure
- III Planning & Evaluation Process
- IV Leadership
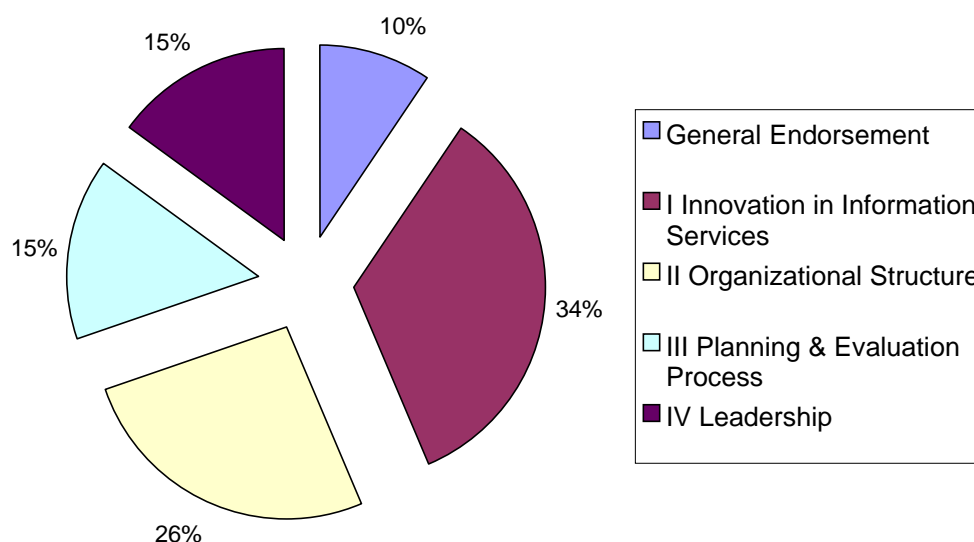
I. Innovations in Information Services

Information services are the interface between the public and the National Agricultural Library. These services are the end result of collection building and organizing, value enhancements, and the technology infrastructure for processing and delivery. The majority of comments supported the innovations in these services as recommended by the Report. Thirty-four percent of all comments responded to this category.

The Report issues seven recommendations relating to innovations in information services. These recommendations in summary are: providing accurate and comprehensive agricultural information made available through extensive use of advanced digital technologies; establishing a national grants program; updating and enhancing the AGRICOLA database; furthering the development of the AgNIC Alliance; deploying cost-effective document delivery solutions and expanding current services; and updating and implementing the Technology Plan of 2002.

> **Librarian comment**
> "As Library Director for the University of Maryland, Center for Environmental Science. I highly endorse your plan. NAL has always been a valuable resource to us. They have been improving service with staff who work exceptionally hard at providing service in a timely manner. It would be wonderful to have services and products equal to those available through NLM."

Figure 5 presents an analysis of the response to each individual recommendation in this category by major job function. The data have been normalized to the number of individuals commenting per group, by dividing the total number of positive responses for a specific recommendation by the total number of responders for each job function. For example, 43 researchers submitted comments on the Report; of these 43 individuals, 31 responded to recommendation I a. The normalized result 0.72 = 31 researcher positive responses to I a. / 43 researcher responses to any aspect of the Report. This same analysis was conducted for each recommendation category, and allows comparisons to be made across recommendations by job function for a better understanding of how each group responded independently.

Fig. 5 I. Innovations in Information Services
(# Responses / # Responders per Job Function)
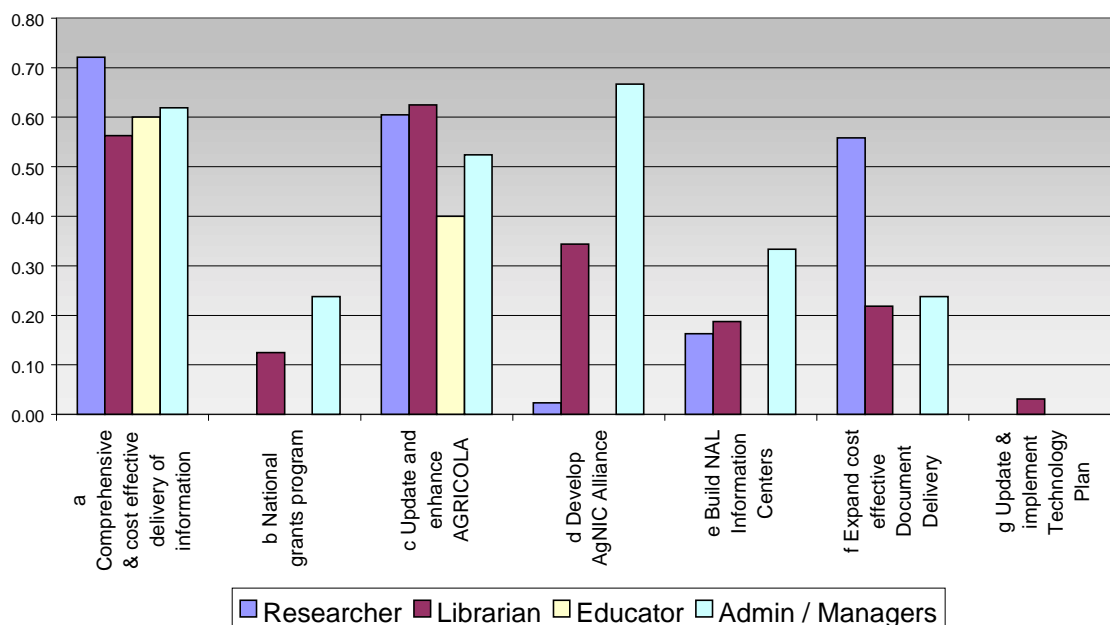
I a. Provide rapid, accurate, comprehensive access to the full range of agricultural information resources through a variety of the most cost-effective delivery systems, but with particular emphasis on ensuring leadership in applications of advanced digital technologies, and based on user-identified needs.[2]

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	31	18	3	13	3

[2] Quoted here in bold italics and throughout the Results section are the recommendations taken from the Executive Summary of the "Report on the National Agricultural Library – 2001".

All groups responded favorably to this recommendation. Educators and researchers were especially interested in this vision of services. Both of these groups are the true end-users of the information services provided. This recommendation expressed what they both need and want. Administrators/Managers and Librarians were equally positive about this recommendation. These two groups are responsible for delivering such services and this analysis indicates they understand and agree with the basic "vision" for customers.

> **Researcher comment**
> "I strongly support this system and hope USDA will understand the importance of ready access to an information base is essential to producing quality information on the forests of the U.S. Without easy access to a comprehensive source of information as discussed above, USDA employees are either forced to spend an inordinate and inefficient amount of time and energy to keep current with other research, and to properly frame their research results, or to just ignore what many other scientists are doing. Please give us the tools we need to be pro-active in providing information of real use to land managers and policy makers."

I b. Establish a national grant program on the NLM model, to be administered by NAL, for the initiation of innovative and collaborative digital projects in agricultural information systems.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	0	4	0	5	0

Administrators and managers as a group responded most favorably to this recommendation. They felt the grants program would encourage the spread and adoption of innovative technology and enhance the AgNIC Alliance. One NAL staff member commenting in support had experienced managing a small grants program that fostered collaborations and development of program-specific information products.

One researcher disagreed with NAL managing the grants program. The concern expressed was the potential duplication of administrative structures and displaced priorities.

> **Librarian comment**
> "I agree with a grants program. AWIC had a grants program at one time that produced many important documents and videotapes. We also supported the Washington University NET VET program as one of the early developers of web based delivery systems. They delivered AWIC publications for us before NAL had a delivery system. Such programs can really harness the creativity of others who just need a rather small infusion of money."

I c. Update and enhance the AGRICOLA database to a level equivalent with the NLM's Medline and PubMed services, particularly through improvements of the Web version, extent of coverage, and linkages to full-text and summaries. Related to this, complete the retrospective conversion of the NAL catalogue to digital form for inclusion in the ISIS online catalogue.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	26	20	2	11	1

AGRICOLA is a widely used resource acknowledged by most responders to be in need of improvement both in terms of the breadth and depth of literature indexed in the database and the online search functionality. The database is an especially important resource for rural and disadvantaged users because it is online and freely available.

Researchers were supportive of AGRICOLA but acknowledged the need for significant improvement in coverage, functionality, and timeliness. Many responders were in favor of developing AGRICOLA capabilities similar to those of PubMed. A range of views was offered about how to achieve this goal. Some questioned whether AGRICOLA should continue as an independent database. One recommendation suggested merging the two databases, thereby freeing NAL to index additional agricultural literature not currently indexed in PubMed.

Librarians voiced support for this recommendation to enhance the AGRICOLA database. They did not consider merging AGRICOLA with PubMed as an option. One responder indicated the need for a national advisory board for the database. One responder commented on the poor response times in conducting searches.

The remaining groups, Administrators/Managers, Educators, and all other responders who commented on this recommendation supported improvements to the AGRICOLA database. One exception was noted to the overall desire to emulate Medline and PubMed.

CAB International publishes CAB ABSTRACTS, an international bibliographic database covering agriculture, and is a not-for-profit, fee supported intergovernmental organization.

I d. Further develop the Agriculture Network Information Center (AgNIC) Alliance and Program as a portal to agricultural information, data and resources, and as a foundation for a national digital library for agriculture.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	1	11	0	14	0

Librarians and Administrators / Managers strongly supported this recommendation. These groups understand the benefits of the Alliance and want to see its content developed, with a robust technological infrastructure. The Chair of the AgNIC Executive Board articulated the view of the membership with respect to NAL's role in the Alliance. Several responders indicated a greater need for NAL coordination and guidance for the Alliance partners and the need to implement quality standards for content and reference services.

The researchers who responded were for the most part USDA employees. The fact that this group did not comment on the need to further develop AgNIC, implies they have not had experience with the resource. Inferentially it may be deduced that the system has not yet developed to a point for NAL to integrate and make full use of the resource in serving information needs within the Department.

Chair, AgNIC Executive Board
"The AgNIC partners are obviously interested in new and innovative information services as outlined in the report. Although not specifically stated in the report, NAL can develop and provide the expertise that will assist Land Grant Universities in the development of fully interoperable information systems. NAL will always be a valuable source of information, but with enhanced funding, it will be even more valued for its information expertise. This implies an even greater outreach role for NAL but one that is essential to its success."

Librarian comment
"The other suggestion is to coordinate AgNIC a little more. Before I took my current job, I had the opportunity to work with the University of Illinois on creating an AgNIC site. I noticed how some sites produce excellent resources, while others were poorly constructed. From my experience, I felt that there was not enough guidance from the NAL for what should be include or exclude. Contact information, for example, is a fairly fundamental element for a web site. One would expect a way to contact those responsible for maintaining a site, which was not the case for several AgNIC partners. I grant that this may be a lack of communication somewhere among the ranks."

Librarian comment
"1.d. . . .as a portal to high quality agricultural information, . . ."

> *I e. Continue to build the NAL Information Centers as subject gateways to key topics of particular interest to citizens, policy makers, and scientists, based on frequent user surveys and knowledge explosion.*

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	7	6	0	7	1

As a group Administrators / Managers responded most favorably to the need to continue building NAL's Information Centers. NAL's Information Centers are often the result of inter-departmental collaborations. One responder encouraged the further development of these collaborations. *Note: This recommendation is related to recommendation I d, in that NAL's Information Centers are for the most part AgNIC partners.*

I f. Identify and initiate cost-effective improvements and expansion of the current document delivery service.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	24	7	1	5	1

At this time NAL provides free of charge document delivery services to USDA employees and a few special customer classes (some of which have been subsidized through interagency reimbursable agreements). Fees are assessed to fulfill requests for most non-USDA patrons. Therefore, it is not surprising that the research group (who are largely USDA employees) expressed strong support for this recommendation. Many of those who responded were located in remote locations and depended upon these services to conduct their research. The Librarians and Administrators / Managers who responded relied on NAL to help fill their requests for materials not in their own collections.

Several USDA researchers commented on the need to implement the NAL Digital Desktop Library Initiative (DigiTop) as a means to provide USDA customers with access to key electronic journals from their desktop, obviating the need for document delivery requests. *Note: The task force was unaware of the DigiTop initiative, which was under discussion at the time of the assessment but was not ready for presentation.*

I g. Update and implement the Technology Plan of 2002 with modifications as needed to accommodate recent emerging advances in technology.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	0	1	0	0	0

The Technology Plan of 2002 is primarily an internal planning document for NAL. There were no specific comments on this recommendation.
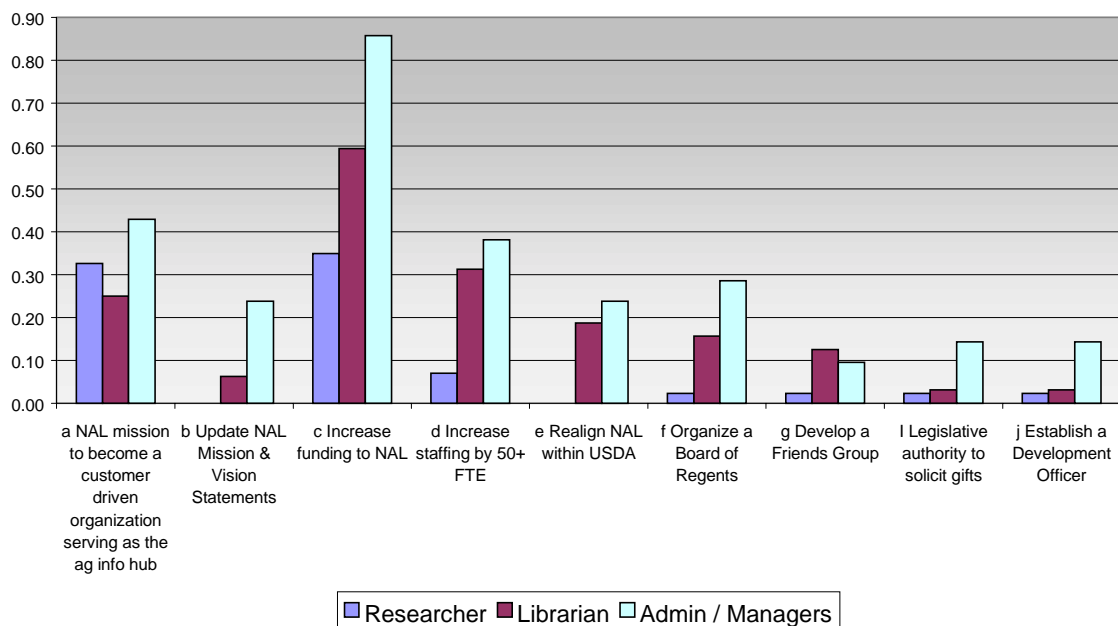
II Organizational Structure

The recommendations in this category describe the practical organizational and institutional elements needed to implement the visionary innovations in technology and services described in the previous section. This category represents 26% of all comments and within the category the comments were overwhelming in favor of increased funding. Overall the Administrators / Managers responded most often which is reflective of their job function. Librarians had the greatest interest in the realignment of NAL within the Department to a position reflecting their interest in NAL's national role. Researchers responded more to the "change" recommendation, that NAL should become more of a hub or gateway to information rather than collecting comprehensively. There were no specific comments from Educators in this category.

**Fig. 6 II Organizational Structure
(#Responses / # Responders per Job Function)**

II a. The NAL should change its self-concept from being a place to that of performing customer-driven functions, and its national role from being the place where every item is, into the role of being the hub through which every item can be obtained online anytime.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	14	8	2	9	2

Several researchers, a librarian, and the Chair of the AgNIC Executive Board wrote in favor of recommendation II a. The librarian and Chair recognized the leadership role

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NAL will need to assume in order to implement this recommendation. One NAL staff member felt this change had already occurred but funding hampered implementation.

> ### II b. Update and reaffirm the NAL mission and vision statements to reflect its mandate as a national library and its commitment to the use of technology to meet the information needs of the U.S. citizenry. Formulation of these statements is the responsibility of the NAL Director and the proposed Board of Regents.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	0	2	0	5	2

A few Administrator/Managers agreed with the recommendation to update the NAL mission and vision statements. This recommendation is related to the "change self-concept" ideas presented in II a, and responder references to vision were often linked to their support of II a. Responder comments on NAL's mission were often made in connection with an enhancement of its national role.

> ### II c. Provide 30 percent increases in funding each year from now until the next 5-year review when programs and services will be formally reassessed and evaluated for successful initiation of new directions. The Panel believes the annual NAL budget should eventually reach approximately $100 million (2001 dollars) to meet its Congressionally mandated mission in the digital age. This will provide sufficient

resources to develop superior expert system search tools, to hire and retain the infotech talent it needs, to fill the growing gaps in its coverage of new knowledge in research journals and historical documents, and to ensure its security in view of the new security hazards it will face. It will enable the NAL to provide services and levels of service required of a National Library in the 21st century.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	15	19	1	18	5

This recommendation received the most support in the category, although there were some concerns and discussion about how the funding increases would be accomplished. The researchers (as a group are primarily USDA employees) who had reservations were concerned the increase in funding for NAL might be drawn from their own research budgets or as agency-level assessments. One Federal librarian thought the increases may be more than needed when efficiencies are realized through automation. However, it should be noted despite these few reservations this recommendation was endorsed overwhelmingly by most responders.

One Administrator/Manager recommended creating a separate line item in the budget for NAL to allow for a more transparent tracking of the NAL budget.

> **Administrator/Manager comment**
> "I support these findings and recommendations and believe that over the years the NAL has been financially neglected. It's visibility continues to decline. Homeland security, West Nile Virus are examples where timely information is more important than ever. These are areas in which the NAL can make major contributions.   I urge the ARS and Congress to take this report seriously and follow up on the well thought out recommendations."

> **Librarian comment**
> "The National Agricultural Library serves not only USDA, but the nation. In recent years, USDA has treated NAL as though it were a departmental library. Unfortunately, information is not free and the various costs associated with collecting, organizing and supplying quality information cannot be negotiated or ignored. NAL's budget is a fraction of what it needs to accomplish its mission. Benign neglect of an important resource to the nation undermines the effectiveness of USDA's mission to disseminate information."

II d. Increase the number of positions by 50 or more during the next 5-year review period.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	3	10	1	8	2

This recommendation is a corollary to the previous recommendation. Those who responded were in favor of the recommendation. One responder cautions fifty may not be enough and a careful analysis of the skill requirements is needed. Several NAL staff members responded with their personal observations on the negative impacts caused by the sustained losses in staffing over the last 5 years.

II e. Realign the NAL within USDA to reflect its national mission. To reflect this mission, the NAL should report directly to the Secretary/Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	0	6	0	5	1

Librarians and Administrator/Managers responded most favorably to this recommendation. Their response reflects the viewpoint of NAL as a library serving a national role. The researchers who responded reflect the interests of NAL as a departmental library, although one speculated that budget support would be no better under the Office of the Secretary.

One responder suggested an alternative to realigning NAL's position within USDA. It was proposed to add representation for NAL through a position on the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board designated for library and information sciences. Another Administrator/Manager suggested establishing NAL as an independent agency reporting to an Under Secretary *in lieu* of a direct report to the Secretary. One librarian recommended including NAL staff on high-level subject specific planning committees and working groups to better inform NAL of emerging Departmental needs and to increase the utilization and build greater support for NAL across the Department.

One research administrator discussed the possibility of moving NAL out of USDA and merging it with the Library of Congress as a means of ensuring better financial and administrative support.

> **Administrator/Manager comment**
> "How is the Library of Congress supported? Would the support of the NAL be stronger if taken entirely out of USDA and connected to the Library of Congress?"

> **Administrator/Manager comment**
> "What seems most important is that USDA ensure appropriate recognition and support for the National Agricultural Library's mission and service roles within and outside USDA. There may be other ways to do this than an organizational realignment. For example, representation on the NAREEE Advisory Board and other relevant USDA entities could be designated for specialists in agricultural librarianship."

> **Administrator/Manager comment**
> "The National Library of Medicine reports to the Director of the NIH. Other national libraries report to technical experts as well, and it seems like it would be a good idea. I wonder about having the NAL report directly to the secretary; it seems to me that ARS may be an even better fit and has the advantage of being closer to the scientists and the laboratories and farther away from the politics. It may be just as difficult to get the funds the library needs from the Secretary's office as it is within the agencies, since the Secretary's office has only a very small budget."

> **Administrator/Manager comment**
> "Third, the library's organizational position within ARS isolates it from the Secretary and USDA subcabinet and from the budget formulation and presentation process. Realigning NAL within USDA to report directly to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary would be ideal, but establishing NAL as an agency reporting to the Undersecretary for REE would be a step forward."

> **Researcher comment**
> "The NAL has been administratively positioned under ARS and I can understand that its importance to a broader community is reflected in the recommendation to have the leaders of the NAL report to a higher level. The current link with ARS; however, does recognize the essential need of the Library to ARS scientists and all other public and private researchers in agriculture and related fields. I trust that the recommended investment in the NAL will be viewed as a critical investment in helping U.S. agriculture scientists remain highly productive. I also trust that public sector agriculture scientists will continue to have access to the NAL resources without assessing the limited budgets of many researchers."

II f. Organize a Board of Regent's, on the NLM model, to direct on long-range planning, advocate for the NAL within USDA and elsewhere, guide the development of new products and services, and monitor for quality in all services. A Strategic Planning Task Force should be appointed and serve until a Board of Regent's is implemented.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	1	5	1	6	0

Researchers, Librarians, and Administrator/Managers all recognized the advantages that a Board of Regents and other advisory groups can bring. Expert guidance can help set difficult priorities, identify opportunities, facilitate collaborations, and provide vital advocacy for the long-term sustainability of the institution.

> *Administrator/Manager comment*
> "Perhaps with an influential Board of Regents to help plan and prioritize long term planning for its programs, services and policies, NAL will have the advocacy that it needs to keep attention, resources and visibility to a level so that it will be unlikely that this problem will occur again."

> *Administrator/Manager comment*
> "The Board of Regents structure is an excellent idea and I hope it will be implemented. An *ex officio* role for the Directors of the other national libraries can help these institutions reinforce our national capabilities."

II g. Develop a NAL Friend's Support group to assist the Board of Regent's and other groups in promoting NAL programs and services.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	1	4	1	2	0

All who commented on this recommendation were supportive and understood the many ways a Friends' support group would aid NAL.

> *Corporate Librarian comment*
> "A Friends group certainly could be of help to the NAL, but as pointed out in the Report, such a group needs supervision and clear direction. I think many of the agricultural producer groups would be willing to share their publications (including conference proceedings) if they were aware that the NAL collection was in need of same. These groups are generally in frequent communication with members of Congress and could be helpful in generating further support for the NAL."

II h. Establish the position of the Director of the NAL in the Senior Executive Service, with a four or more year term, and renewed based on performance; library degree is preferred but not required.

(The strength of interest on the panel [task force] on this issue is represented by its range of opinions, ranging from one emphasizing an exclusive political appointment to opinions that were open to either/or: political appointment or inclusion in the Senior Executive Service, to opinions advocating inclusion exclusively in the Senior Executive Services.)

Note: To better represent the diversity of opinion expressed on this recommendation, three pairs of opposing choices were created. Only one choice from any pair would be selected per response.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other	
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8	
SES / 4 yr Term	1	1	0	1	0	Pair
SES / No Term	1	0	0	1	0	1
Political Appt.	0	0	0	0	0	Pair
Not Political	3	2	0	1	0	2
MLS Preferred	0	1	0	2	0	Pair
MLS Not Pref.	0	1	0	0	1	3

While there were differences in opinion regarding the position of the NAL Director there was no support for this position to be a political appointment. All responders supported a Senior Executive Service appointment, although opinion was evenly split over on the issue of a term limit. Opinion was also evenly split over the issue of professional library science credentials; some felt the degree was not as important as a strong technical background while others felt library credentials to be essential to the position.

> **Researcher comment**
> "I agree with the creation of an SES level director's position, but STRONGLY disagree with any attempt to make this a Political Appointment! The mission of the NAL is too critical to the mission of other agencies for its vision to be limited to 4 year increments. The end result could be devastating, not only to NAL, but to the many agencies and organizations within the agricultural industry that depend on NAL for access to information."

> **Professional Association Comment**
> "The American Library Association would note that historically our Association has strongly recommended a qualified library background for the head of any National library, and thus would take issue with the Report's statement that this need not be a requirement."

> **Administrator/Manager Comment**
> "The panel recommends establishing the position of the Director of the NAL in the Senior Executive Service, with a four or more year term, and renewal based on performance; library degree is preferred but not required.(Executive Summary II. Organizational Structure point h.) I agree with the position but would argue the point that a library degree is preferred but not required. Library degrees are much more broad-based these days and include information science and technology. I believe that the best advocate for the Library would be an accredited librarian."

II i. Authorize the NAL to solicit and accept donations, with those funds exclusively designated for use by the NAL.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	1	1	0	3	0

A few general comments from responders supported this recommendation. One responder who would expand NAL's role to serve as a western hemisphere clearinghouse suggested additional sources of funding such as the Organization of American States.

II j. Establish a Development Officer to enhance liaison with private foundations and individual donors.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8

Tot # for this recommendation	1	1	1	3	0

All groups responded favorably to this recommendation. It was generally recognized that a Development Officer would focus on soliciting external donations and gifts to support overall programs and the collections.

> **Administrator/Manager comment**
> "A Development Office function would help NAL gain funding to supplement and complement base funding from Congressional appropriations."

III. Planning and Evaluation Processes

The Planning and Evaluation Processes category received approximately 15% of all comments. The recommendations in this category reflect processes that support the sustained development and functioning of NAL as both a Departmental Library and as a National Library. In general Administrators/Managers responded most frequently to the category, consistent with their administrative job functions. The majority of comments in this category supported planning for the National Digital Library of Agriculture. This reflects the significant support for enhanced electronic access to information resources by all groups. The recommendations in this category include: formal five year review process, obtaining consistent customer input, establishing a USDA Advisory Board, initiating a long-range planning process, planning the development of the National Digital Library for Agriculture, identifying market managers for customer liaison, and facilities and space management practices.

> **Research Administrator/Manager comment**
> "Fourth, the planning and evaluation processes recommended by the panel should be implemented immediately! There can be no better use of the library's resources than to establish a strategic plan, especially to provide a framework for timely budget formulation."

Fig. 7 III Planning & Evaluation Process
(# Responses / # Responders by Job Function)
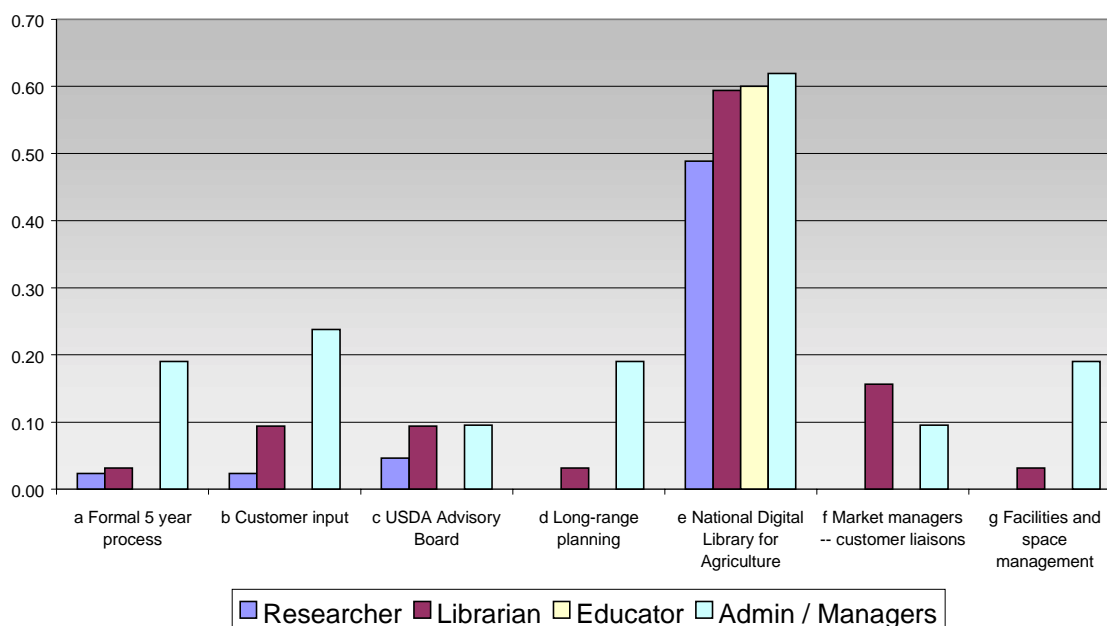
III a. Introduce a formal five-year review by external reviewers, including USDA personnel, to ensure progress on long-range plans and customer service orientation, with a 100% turnover of the membership of that review group every 4-5 years.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	1	1	0	4	0

All who responded were in favor of this recommendation. In some cases this was felt to be a recommendation to be adopted in the near future. The need for customer input was specifically identified as necessary in the review and planning processes.

Administrator/Manager comment
"In order to continue growing into a true National Library the NAL needs to implement a formal review process that includes feedback from internal and external customers."

III b. Implement a system to obtain ongoing input from all categories of customers (web, in-person, mail, telephone) and summarize the information in

an annual report. These reports should include actions taken in response to customer input and should be available to the public through the NAL website.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	1	3	1	5	0

Many responders expressed their appreciation for being given the opportunity to provide input on the Report and services of the NAL. Through these comments the responders informally supported this recommendation (however, such comments were not coded). Several responders pointed out the need to ensure the inclusion of internal as well as external stakeholders for input, including internal NAL matters, notably those involving information technology planning. A specific method for obtaining input was suggested for AGRICOLA (see I c) with the proposed AGRICOLA national advisory board.

> **Administrator/Manager comment**
> "Among the Planning and Evaluation Recommendations, I especially support the call for "a national digital library for agriculture (NDLA) that will be the main focus and long-term organizing principle for NAL and the national network of university and industrial libraries."
> It is clear that renewed emphasis must be placed on long-range planning and the participation of external stakeholders in this process."

III c. Establish internal advisory groups from USDA agencies to provide feedback to NAL about its products, services, and long-range plans.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	2	3	1	2	0

Many USDA responders expressed their appreciation for being given this opportunity to express their views, implicitly supporting this recommendation (although such comments were not coded as such). One researcher expressed a need for an internal ARS advisory council. The value of customer input was often related by responders to the planning and evaluation processes.

> **Researcher comment**
> "I also feel that an internal USDA advisory group from ARS should be formed, to present current researcher needs to the NAL leadership."

III d. Results from the five-year reviews and all other feedback data should guide the long-range planning process. Long-range plans should be developed

for a five-year period, with annual updates by the Director and the proposed Board of Regents to ensure continued viability.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	0	1	0	4	1

There were very few comments and no discussion related to this recommendation.

III e. Complete and implement a plan for a national digital library for agriculture (NDLA) that will be the main focus and the long-term organizing principle for NAL and the national network of university and industrial libraries.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	21	19	3	13	1

Support for increased electronic access to information resources was a common theme running throughout the comments. The National Digital Library for Agriculture as noted in the report is the central organizing principle to provide these services. This concept was clearly supported by all groups.

Two librarians identified issues related to this overall direction. One pointed out that issues of copyright will need to be addressed and will limit full implementation. Another responder reminded us that researchers will still need personalized services and there remains a need to serve individuals who are not technologically equipped. This last point had surfaced in a number of comments relating to NAL's role as a national library serving the nation – including the disadvantaged. Even with these reservations the overwhelming response has been in favor of this recommendation.

Researcher comment
"I'm encouraged by recommendations related to the development of a digital library. I believe this is vitally important for ARS scientists to be at the leading edge of agricultural research. The NAL Digital Desktop Initiative, which I learned about after receiving the NAL Report, is definitely a move in the right direction."

Librarian comment
"I'm most in agreement with the need for greater electronic access to information. The main obstacle to this is copyright I realize. Even so, a great deal can be offered online full-text."

III f. Establish liaisons within NAL who will act as market managers to track specified NAL customer segments for their needs and user satisfaction.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	0	5	0	2	0

This recommendation is closely related to the systematic collection of customer input (III b). A few individuals commented on the need to market more effectively the services of NAL. These comments support the market manager concept envisioned by the task

force. One librarian suggested placing NAL staff on high-level planning committees as a means to capture "market" information from within the Department.

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Librarian comment
"I strongly recommend the completion of the plan to make the NAL a truly national library that can be used easily by the public. It should also be marketed to the public as a means to get agricultural and horticultural information of all kinds. As a librarian, I use it frequently, but I think it must be made more user friendly for use by the general public. It is a great resource and should be brought up to current technological standards."

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Librarian comment
"II. e. a new item or maybe this belongs close to III.f. Position staff so they are integral parts of high level subject-specific planning committees and working groups and use the information they glean to support NAL and other USDA agencies and customers."

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III g. Develop a plan for facilities management and improvements, including space requirements, as an integral part of the long-range planning process.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	0	1	0	4	0

NAL is housed in a 30+ year structure which has begun to deteriorate. The need for additional planning and upgrades was recognized by a few responders. *Note: NAL has been designated as a modernization site eligible for building and facilities funding and has received such funding in the last several years.*

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Administrator/Manager comment
"When one looks at the funding history and structures of the other national libraries, it becomes obvious why the lack of progress in a variety of basic library functions has been experienced in the last decade. The disparity is obvious and startling. To give the NAL dual roles without commensurate support has placed the organization and staff at peril.   To further complicate the matter, the National Agricultural Library is housed in a building built more than 3 decades ago and has many maintenance needs. It has extra needs because of inadequate support which has allowed some systems to break down completely and make repairs a waste of time."

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IV. Leadership

The Report makes four specific recommendations: urging NAL to adopt a leadership role in knowledge management for agriculture; to advance the preservation of USDA digital publications and help coordinate a national digital preservation program; to lead the

development of advanced digital delivery of agricultural information; and to expand the development of collaborative partnerships in collection development, preservation, and archiving.

Librarians and Library Administrators responded in force to these recommendations which outline the national role they need NAL to serve. Researchers and others interested in developing the national digital library for agriculture also supported these recommendations.

Fig. 8 IV Leadership
(# Responses / # Responders by Job Function)
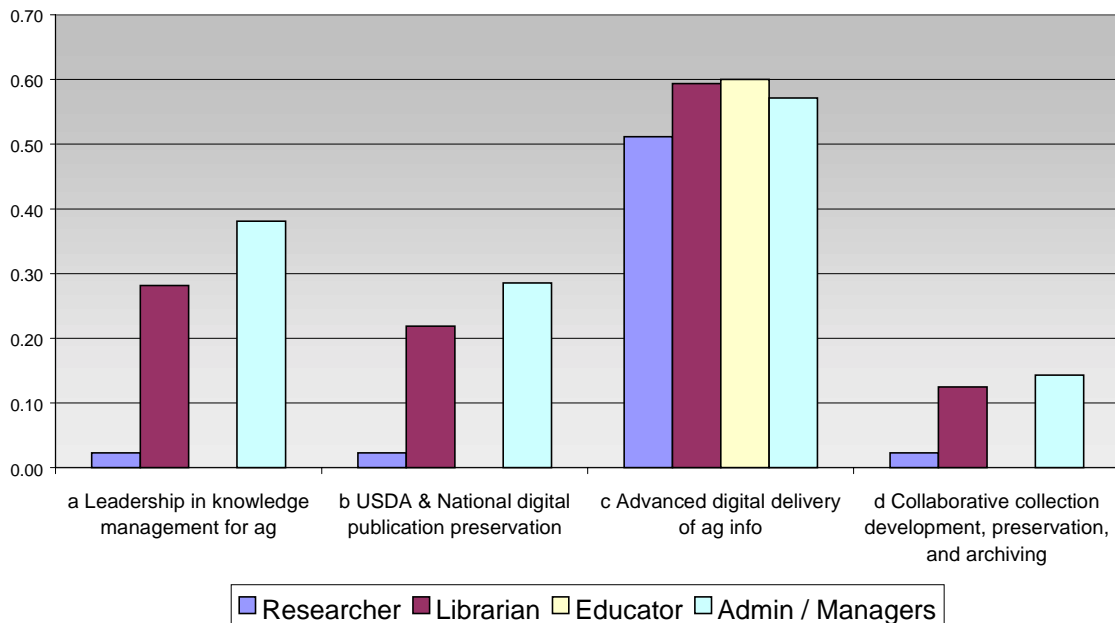
IV a. Provide leadership for and become the central hub of the world's agriculture libraries to facilitate users' access and use of agricultural information on a perpetual basis using a knowledge management approach.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	1	9	0	8	1

This recommendation is the internal framework underpinning the concept of a national digital library for agriculture and is closely related to recommendation II a. The importance of this framework was clearly understood by the Administrator/Managers and Librarians. The researchers were interested in the outcome of this recommendation (one-stop-shopping, powerful search engines, and so forth).

Librarian

"NAL should provide the leadership for and become the central hub of the world's agricultural libraries to facilitate users' access and use of agricultural information on a perpetual basis using the available technology."

Librarian comment

"As an agriculture librarian at a land-grant institution, I look to the NAL to provide national leadership in emerging areas of information delivery and in maintaining collections that support and enhance those available at the local level.   During the past several decades, NAL has been particularly strong in building collaborations with the agricultural information community throughout the nation. In spite of extremely limited USDA support for NAL and such national initiatives, there has been considerable progress made in the use of new technologies and approaches for developing broad-based information systems. The fact that these efforts have been largely voluntary speaks to the commitment and vision of NAL, the land-grant universities, and others who are sustaining these programs."

IV b. Continue to develop the NAL role in the preservation of digital publications-and- data initiative of the USDA and in the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	1	7	0	6	0

Administrators/Managers and Librarians responded most favorably to this recommendation. Researchers tend to have an immediate focus on current research but turn to librarians when they need to research older works, therefore unless their research typically involves such historical research, as a group, they do not often think about preservation. On the other hand, this is an important job function and issue in the library community. The responses received are consistent with these diverse job functions. It

was recognized in the comments that digital preservation also provides an opportunity to increase access to these resources and will further build a national digital collection.

Researcher comment
"As a scientist I know that access to prior knowledge is vitally important to effective research. The investment of taxpayer money toward creating and maintaining an efficient scientific information sharing system will be repaid many-fold in improved public problem solving and increased research effectiveness. This investment should be viewed as a low-cost way to make a significant incremental improvement in nutritional, environmental, and agricultural research across the entire USDA, university, and private research spectrum."

Librarian comment
"The digital preservation function is larger than perceived and one that relates to digital library development, since preservation and archiving, when done correctly, are initiated at the beginning of publications' life cycle and are part of overall life cycle management. In order for digital preservation and archiving activity to become a reality at NAL and within the Department, an infusion of resources is needed as well as a strong commitment within and throughout NAL as well as the Department."

Univ. of Wisconsin – Extension, Cooperative Extension comment
"We would like to acknowledge the NAL has been challenged by unrealistic expectations given their level of funding. We would like to applaud their current work with AgNIC and we endorse the panel's recommendation that NAL should move as quickly as possible to attain and maintain a leadership position in using the tools of the electronic digital age to meet demands of customers located anywhere and in need of information anytime."

Chair, AgNIC Executive Board comment
"Enhanced preservation efforts will enable NAL to continue the stewardship of the information resources entrusted to the library. However, NAL can also "liberate" this information by making it available to all potential users via new electronic channels or media and in a format readable on current technology. Each item preserved is also an information resource that can be used by numbers of citizens and scholars."

One responder commented from the international perspective on NAL's role in preservation.

International Librarian comment
"We support the findings of the report and see the role of the library from an international perspective as: preserving agency and other U.S. materials, digitising and making them available online. Libraries around the world who have collected print publications such as those of the experiment stations are rationalising their collections and would like to be assured of long-term access, preferably in digital form. ..."

IV c. Continue to take a leadership role in the development of national digital efforts to bring the wealth of agriculture-related information and knowledge to

U.S. citizens by using the most advanced technologies and by developing the most advanced and easily used expert online search system available.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	22	19	3	12	1

This recommendation was coded together with I a and II e when interest was expressed to increase electronic access. As seen above there was strong interest by all groups of responders to increasing electronic access to agricultural information. Electronic access was felt to be especially important in serving rural and disadvantaged customers. Many USDA scientists in the Forest Service, Agricultural Research Service, and Animal, Plant, Health Inspection Service are located in remote locations with limited access to research libraries. Electronic services are vital to their work. Many librarians view this as an arena in which NAL can provide national leadership and administrators/managers understand customer needs are changing and this is the future for libraries.

Researcher comment
"I certainly agree with the task force report, especially as it relates to the need for improvement. In comparison to the resources available to academia we feel like a poor relative. Electronic access to integrated databases and electronic journals are crucial to my science. My field is advancing too quickly. How am I to keep up without timely access to information? I simply will not be able to compete with those scientists with access to a modern library. The Digital Desktop Initiative, if it is funded properly, will help. Modernize!"

Librarian comment
"The four additional land grant institutions in the U.S. affiliated Pacific are also geographically isolated and have extremely limited resources. The free information resources provided by NAL (AGRICOLA, AgNIC and the NAL Information Centers) are crucial to the agricultural research and teaching that take place at these institutions.

The Pacific Island institutions need a national library to provide for agriculture the types of resources that the National Library of Medicine does for its field. In order to provide this type of leadership and innovative information resources, the National Agriculture Library needs to have a budget similar to that of the NLM as well as commensurate personnel resources."

IV d. Enhance contractual collaborative relationships with other governmental agencies and non-governmental units to meet the NAL's mission for collaborative collection development, preservation, and archival functions.

	researcher	librarian	Educator	Admin/ Manager	all other
Total Number	43	32	5	21	8
Tot # for this recommendation	1	4	0	3	0

NAL has established collaborative relationships with: the Library of Congress and the
National Library of Medicine in collection development; CAB International and the Food
and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for selective indexing of agricultural
literature; and the United States Agricultural Information Network for preservation of the
core literature of agriculture. The task force recognized and encouraged these efforts
with this recommendation. These are largely library functions and both librarians and
library administrators supported the recommendation.

Several researchers commented on the uniqueness and value of the NAL collections. Librarians remarked on NAL's position as the national library in a national library system. In this national role, NAL serves as the library of last resort, and should hold in its collections materials not readily found elsewhere.

Researcher comment

"During the last 26 years (20 years as an ARS scientist and 6 previous years as graduate student or postdoctoral associate), I have depended on NAL for acquiring the literature needed for my research. During most of this period, I have been at remote locations and unable to directly access a library. NAL has and is providing an invaluable service. It has been especially helpful in obtaining old or obscure publications either from its own collections or through interlibrary loans."

Researcher comment

"I am a geographer doing land use studies related to biodiversity and habitat issues for neotropical migratory birds. The use of the NAL, while sporadic for me personally, is indispensable in the type of research I conduct. Whether I go directly to the library in Beltsville, or whether I request information/literature via our own library, the wealth of documents contained and maintained by the NAL provides us here with a treasure trove of data."

Administrator/Manager comment

"As the Head of a Life Sciences library at a Land-Grant institution I realize the importance of the NAL. We use the resources of the NAL on a daily basis and rely on them to have the materials that we do not. It is imperative for the NAL to update and enhance the AGRICOLA database to bring it up to a level equivalent with the NLM's Medline and PubMed services. Two other very important services that require attention are the NAL Information Centers and the AgNIC Alliance."

Professional Association comment

"An article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, dated September 13, 2002, discusses an amendment in the House bill on homeland-security that would allow development of a university-based research center for homeland security. One of the qualifications for this university applicant would be its "pre-existing relationship with the Department of Agriculture's laboratories and training centers." The value of a strong National Agricultural Library while not specifically mentioned in the article, is clear. Not only is there a connection between research institutions and the NAL and a reliance upon its resources, but there is an established standard of information of "last resort" that libraries use that are part of a national library structure. In other words, NAL should be the information source when all other sources fail. The Report recognizes the value of many of the products like the AGRICOLA database and the AgNIC network that the NAL provides, but also recognizes the need for a significant infusion of funds for improvement of services to the scientists, researchers and the agricultural community across the country."

Other Observations

EDUCATION

NAL is a specialized research library holding a research collection that does not support fully primary school educators and students. Several educators responding to the Report indicated a desire to see more resources made available to them. One librarian suggested greater involvement with the USDA Higher Education Program.

> *Educational Policy-Maker*
> "I was surprised that so little was mentioned about education, the role of NAL and USDA as it relates to formal schooling or even to the general education of America's citizens, especially since so many of the panelists are from higher education ... Report seems a bit narrow in focus-- and shallow even in mentioning the 'natural constituents partners in the ag community.
>
> * This is in contrast to variety of government agencies, like NASA that articulate the vital role of agencies and education. Note that Administrator Sean O'Keefe, appointed by President Bush, is currently restructuring the agency and has declared that one of the three core missions of NASA is Education!!"

> *Educator comment*
> "As a public school agricultural education teacher I find the national library very helpful. I would like to see more materials available to ag ed teachers online to use in teaching/research. I am also director of a group called Agrimissions and do International work and would like to see materials in that arena made available."

> *Librarian comment*
> "Utilize USDA Higher Education Program priorities to link to/further develop the Agriculture Network Information Center."

PARTNERSHIPS/COLLABORATIONS & INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

The Report did touch on many collaborations and partnership arrangements in its recommendations for NAL. Many responders were supportive of the recommendations. Many suggestions centered on the AGRICOLA database with suggestions to partner or collaborate with the National Library of Medicine or other database publishers including CAB International. One responder encouraged collaboration among the National libraries in a more general sense, including exchange programs with visiting scholars. The land grant libraries were interested in collaborating on national initiatives such as AgNIC, preservation, and the national digital library for agriculture. The responders also brought forth the need to consider broader international collaborations.

> *Librarian comment*
> "...meet the NAL mission for collaborative collection development, preservation, archival and **"professional developmental opportunities,"** e.g. visiting scholars national and international programs."

SECURITY

The Report was written prior to the events of 9/11/01. At the time of writing the primary security threats considered were more in the nature of cyber-security. A few responders commented on the need to consider security issues in normal operations – but also recommended that NAL's collection, as a national treasure should be given commensurate protection.

STAFF ISSUES

Several responders raised concerns about the ability of the NAL staff and its managers to meet the challenges of serving the agricultural community. Specifically the promotion of staff from within to management positions was viewed as detrimental. On the other hand, the President of a small woman-owned company cautioned that industry benchmarks should be applied before acting upon employee complaints of this nature during a time of significant financial constraint.

Discussion

Many responders commented on how they value the services and resources of the National Agricultural Library. They view the Library as an important resource that helps them to be productive and efficient in their jobs. They often complimented NAL for having accomplished much within limited resources. Some wrote of the national need for NAL to serve as a resource for: county extension agents; city-based child nutritionists working with Head Start programs; advocates for rural and disadvantaged clients trying to rebuild impoverished communities; and small business R & D departments who need to develop products for niche markets not filled by larger enterprises.

Throughout the comments a few common themes emerged that bear discussion and consideration. The themes relate to the responder's relationship to NAL.

The responders and their relationship to NAL

For the sake of this discussion two principal relationships exist between the responder and NAL:
- USDA employees who receive services from NAL (81% of researchers and 10% of the Administrators/Managers) ,
- All other responders.

These USDA employees receive document delivery and other services without charge. The remaining responders are librarians, researchers, managers, and other members of the larger food, nutrition, and agricultural system who do not necessarily receive these specialized services. The following sections describe the unique needs of each group.

NAL as a Departmental Library and National Library

Many USDA researchers wrote how they have experienced an improvement in document delivery services and how vital the services NAL provides are to them, especially those who are working in remote locations. They supported the NAL-led Digital Desk Top Library Initiative (DigiTop) as a means to get persistent electronic access to key journals and databases at their workstations. In general they were pleased with services provided and would like to see further improvements. This group represented the stakeholder community for NAL as a Departmental Library.

All other responders spoke of the need for a national library to provide leadership in managing agricultural information. They spoke of collaborations and partnerships and extending services to the disadvantaged. They also wrote of the need for NAL to serve as the library of last resort, holding in the national collection those items that are missing from their own collections. This group represented the stakeholder community for NAL as a National Library.

After reviewing the comments as a whole it would appear that NAL has provided reasonably good services to its USDA customers, but is struggling to in its leadership role as a National Library.

Placement of NAL within USDA

USDA employees for the most part felt that NAL should remain within ARS. They felt a close connection to NAL and in some cases wanted an even closer relationship through the establishment of an internal advisory group that could represent their needs to NAL.

In comparison nearly all other responders felt NAL should be realigned within the Department. They felt the national role for NAL was not supported and in fact neglected. Options proposed for realignment included the resumption of independent agency status reporting to an Under-Secretary; or increased national visibility through representation on the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board or even through the simple expedient of a separate budget line in the Department's Appropriation legislation.

Budget

USDA employees were generally supportive of an increase to NAL's budget although a number expressed concern that the increase would be taken from their budgets. Under those circumstances they were less in favor of budget increases. It might be inferred they feared having to fund NAL's national role through their Departmental allocations. They wrote of NAL needing to take a leadership role in developing external advocacy groups to gain additional Congressional support for NAL's national mission.

Virtually all other responders understood that NAL's lack of success in meeting its legislated mandate to serve as the national library for agriculture was wholly linked to a serious lack of resources. Several responders were stunned when they read of the dramatic disparity in budgets between NAL and the National Library of Medicine (NLM) (especially when given to understand the equality of the two budgets less than 30 years ago). They cited the advances made in biomedical research with the support of a well-funded NLM and speculated on the potential advances in agricultural research if it were equally well supported by a similarly supported National Agricultural Library.

AGRICOLA

USDA employees supported enhancements to AGRICOLA and many wanted AGRICOLA to emulate PubMed. Many in this group are sophisticated users, conducting advanced biological research where the literature they need to consult is often in biomedical or other non-agricultural disciplines. They need access to an integrated database covering a broader range of subjects. Several in this group suggested merging the two databases, freeing NAL to cover in greater depth those journals and sources not currently covered in PubMed. It was not clear from the comments if they meant for these additional sources to be added into a greater PubMed database. Despite the breadth and

depth of literature covered in PubMed, AGRICOLA continues to index key agricultural sources not available elsewhere.

The other responders are a more diverse group. They find AGRICOLA a valuable resource and do not want to see it lost. They are interested in seeing AGRICOLA enhanced and improved – particularly the Web interface and system performance. Some would like to see it emulate PubMed, while others would not. It would appear that AGRICOLA is filling an important niche for many of these stakeholders; perhaps the literature covered is a better match for their needs and less so for the USDA researcher.

The AGRICOLA database has a very diverse customer/stakeholder base which has not been well characterized. Reflective of this diverse customer base were the many opinions expressed, which demonstrates a lack of consensus for future actions. Given this diversity an in-depth study is desirable. For example, it is not known what the impact of merging AGRICOLA with PubMed would have for the non-USDA customer. Likewise, it is not understood at a community level what the impact would be if control of the database were given to NLM, possibly without representation on appropriate indexing advisory boards, or if NAL would be able contribute agriculturally important records to an enlarged PubMed.

An in-depth study should assess the uniqueness and value of the AGRICOLA database; characterize the customer base and its diverse needs; and evaluate the options for action. It is also clear the AGRICOLA database is considered a valuable national resource, but unfortunately a resource whose value is eroding at a dangerous rate.